

Dear Editor:

I recently had the opportunity to address the Board of Directors of ArMA and hope such appearance resulted in a greater understanding by physicians of the role of the PRO and H.S.A.G.

It is my impression that the questions presented me indicate concern in the following areas:

1. Is review being done in a manner which assures fairness and competence?
2. Is there adequate provision for the appeal of decisions?
3. Is there some ulterior motive, pecuniary or otherwise, which influences medical review by H.S.A.G.?
4. Is the PRO program so off base in relation to provision of good medical care that it is best ignored by practicing physicians?

You are well aware of my belief that medical review by the government is a reality and that there is no question whether it shall or shall not be done, but only one as to who will do the review. In that setting, I think H.S.A.G. is presently and could be even more so in the future a reasonable choice to interface between government regulations and quality medical care. If such is not the case, then it would seem to me it behooves everyone to make it so. If, in the future, the Arizona Medical Association is convinced that H.S.A.G. is simply not capable or willing to provide the kind of medical review that is acceptable to

physicians then certainly it should make these feelings known and do everything possible to replace H.S.A.G. with a group which would be more acceptable. This, I feel certain, should be another organization of local physicians rather than the Fiscal Intermediary or an out of state physicians' group.

To make certain that the present system works correctly, we encourage, as much as possible, participation of members of ArMA. Certainly some of the concerns voiced which would suggest that due process is not followed could be assuaged by participation of more practicing physicians unassociated with H.S.A.G. in making review decisions. In the final analysis, however, it is the responsibility of the Board of Directors of H.S.A.G. to review decisions made by reviewing physicians if those reviewing physicians have found what they consider to be aberrant behavior.

Some of the comments which suggested that it was only fair for physicians who are "criticized" to be able to sit across the table from their "accusers" are simply not manageable. When physicians, either by their request or ours, appear before H.S.A.G. committees it is the role of the committee to consider whether decisions made at a lower level are appropriate. It is at this level that additional input, perhaps and hopefully through ArMA, would be of great value.

Assuming that physicians who have no vested interest in the success or failure of H.S.A.G. were to take part in these hearings, I would think the best interest of the medical community would be served. Perhaps you could also consider this possibility.

I had no time during my presentation to inform the audience of additional actions which will be required of the PRO in the coming months. As you probably know, there will be mandatory Second Opinion Programs for some ten surgical procedures. There will also be mandatory precertification of the need for assistant surgeons during the performance of cataract surgery. There may be involvement of H.S.A.G. in the review of care provided by prepaid health plans to Medicare beneficiaries which would include outpatient review. Laws and regulations are not made by H.S.A.G. The presence of H.S.A.G. on the local scene hopefully allows practicing physicians the ability to see that the implementation of regulations is done in as reasonable a fashion as possible. I would beseech the Arizona Medical Association to become an active participant in the PRO program for the benefit of its membership and their patients.

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President, H.S.A.G.